Presentation by Rick Taupier, PhD

Mongols and Oirats as Peacekeepers: Buddhist Warriors Behind the Lotus Throne

Historians have written extensively about the ways in which Tibetan Buddhism and culture had far reaching influences in central Asia and more recently throughout much of the modern world. This paper focuses on a different theme. It is concerned with the multiple times that Mongols and Oirats interceded in the affairs of Tibetans and in most cases ushered in periods of peace and relative prosperity. From this perspective, Tibet is not the central agent, extending its religious system and largess to other people, but rather an arena in which external forces made possible important cultural advances while suppressing or eliminating dissent and internal turmoil.

This paper is about five significant occasions in which Mongol or Oirat khans interceded in Tibetan politics by force or threat of force to quiet secular and sectarian conflicts. The effects of those interventions had important consequences, altering internal developments and advancing certain political and religious causes.

Direct Mongolian influence in Tibet began in the mid 13th century when Godan Khan, son of Ogedei, demanding that Sakya Pandita appear at his court. It continued under Khubilai Khan and the Yuan Dynasty, and to some extent during the 16th century under Altan Khan and the Third Dalai Lama, Sonam Gyatso. The Fourth Dalai Lama, of Mongolian descent, was accompanied to Lhasa in the early 17th century by a Mongol force, to protect him from political and religious rivals. Between 1637 and 1642 the Khoshud Oirat Gushii Khan conquered all the enemies of the young Fifth Dalai Lama. In 1642 Gushii Khan gave the Dalai Lama supreme religious and secular authority over Tibet, allowing him to unify power under the Ganden Podrang.

Thus, Mongolians and Oirats with their own agenda unequivocally altered development of what we now call Tibetan Buddhism and the Tibetan State. But the final tale in this saga concerns the role of Zannabazar in entering into an alliance with the Manchus and whether or not his actions, while placing Mongolia under Qing control, preserved the elements of Mongolian identity that allowed Mongolia to survive into the modern era.
Profile

Rick Taupier, PhD, works for the University of Massachusetts Amherst as Associate Director for Research Development. He holds a PhD in Regional Environmental Planning and an MS in Environmental Economics, both from the University of Massachusetts Amherst. Rick is also a PhD candidate in History, with a focus on Central Asian Buddhist cultures, particularly Mongolian and Tibetan political and cultural history. He has done extensive research in the adoption of Buddhism by both eastern and western (Oirat) Mongolian people and the extent to which Buddhist ideology shaped Mongolian and Oirat politics. His research activities in environmental and cultural sustainability led to a recent focus on the sustainability of Mongolian herding families. In 2009 and 2010 he was a Senior Fulbright Specialist at the National University of Mongolia.